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Brief 7: Preparing for the Next Wave of Faculty

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NERCHE BRIEF

**New England Resource Center for Higher Education
May 2001**

The following Brief from the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) is a distillation of the work by members of NERCHE's think tanks and projects from a wide range of institutions. NERCHE Briefs emphasize policy implications and action agendas from the point of view of the people who tackle the most compelling issues in higher education in their daily work lives. With support from the Ford Foundation, NERCHE disseminates the Briefs to a targeted audience of higher education leaders and media contacts. The Briefs are designed to add critical information and essential voices to the development of higher education policies and the improvement of practice at colleges and universities.

Preparing for the Next Wave of Faculty

Ten years ago higher education scholars predicted a major faculty turnover in the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century—a prediction based on demographic data on an aging faculty. The turnover is under way, accelerated by early retirement policies. Currently blocks of faculty positions are opening up at regional colleges and universities, and new faculty are being hired in groups, rather than a few at a time. In larger universities, the impact of this kind of hiring is felt most acutely at the department level. At small institutions, the effects can be institution wide. Throughout this academic year, NERCHE's Department Chairs, Chief Academic Officers, and Associate Deans Think Tanks have examined changes in faculty demographics and discussed the structures and policies that campuses need to orient and retain new faculty.

As reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* a short time ago, many colleges and universities have raised the research requirements for tenure. These institutions are competing for high quality faculty in order to attract students and their tuition dollars.

Doctoral students understand that to prepare for the tenure process, they must carve out an area of specialization early on. By the time they have completed their doctoral program, many have also produced their first book. While these young scholars are being trained to meet the expectations for faculty at research universities, the reality is that most of them will not be hired by these institutions. They will likely be hired by small colleges and teaching-oriented institutions that emphasize interdisciplinary work, flexibility, and service. Having focused on research, young scholars may be less adaptable than their older counterparts at these institutions who tend to be generalists. The implications for faculty development are far ranging.

Some graduate programs, disciplinary associations, and national projects, such as the Preparing Future Faculty program, coordinated by The Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools, are beginning to work with graduate students and new faculty to equip them for their faculty roles. However, not all of these faculty are recently-minted PhD's. Newly hired faculty are diverse in age and experience as well as gender and race. Some very seasoned faculty join departments as untenured associate professors. They may have considerable teaching experience on a variety of campuses. A few are entering higher education in "second careers" with extensive experience in industry and the professions. College administrators may misjudge both the level of sophistication and the developmental needs of these new but experienced hires. These scholars may need different kinds of orientation, support, and mentoring than their younger colleagues.

Another characteristic of new faculty is that many are part timers or adjuncts. While it may be a buyer's market, most institutions still have to be cost-conscious. They lack the financial resources to support a large number of tenured positions. Whether part timers are integrated into a department depends on many variables or combinations of variables such as: size of department, number of part timers, longevity of their jobs, personal initiative, culture of the department, availability of technology for distance learning, number of courses that part timers teach per semester. Departments and

institutions must find ways for adjuncts and part timers to connect to full-time faculty and departments and, in the case of small colleges, the institution as a whole.

More often than not, new faculty are part of two-career families, commute to campus from a distance, and juggle responsibilities for children and aging parents. In addition, recent studies suggest that young scholars weigh quality of life issues and location more heavily than did their predecessors. Whether a new faculty member accepts a non-tenure-track position can turn on the department's willingness to accommodate the personal needs of a candidate.

These new, highly diverse faculty bring with them added complications to relationships with existing faculty. It is not merely a matter of a new generation assuming the mantle of its elders. On some campuses the clash of new and existing faculty cultures has made mediation necessary between junior and senior faculty, neither of whom understands the others' expectations or ways of operating. While this situation may be exceptional, it brings to light the extent to which the profile of faculty has been transformed.

Members of NERCHE think tanks developed the following set of recommendations.

Policy Implications:

- Provide Ongoing Orientation Formal one-shot faculty orientations are limited as a means of introducing faculty to departmental and institutional cultures. Ideally, faculty orientation and socialization begin in the job interview. Candidates can learn about institutional and departmental philosophy and community in this setting. Faculty orientation itself needs to be an ongoing, year-long process which is carried out in both the department and the institution. Involving existing faculty as well in year-long orientations provides a way to socialize veteran faculty to the changes that new faculty will necessarily bring to their departments.

- Support Faculty on the Tenure Track Department chairs play a pivotal role in supporting and mentoring new faculty. Chairs need to protect and advocate for new tenure-track faculty who often have trouble prioritizing multiple needs of the department and/or institution. The temptation in already overburdened departments is to pile responsibilities onto a new faculty member. The department chair has to ensure that junior faculty members have the time and resources to complete the work for their tenure. For example, new faculty should have access to departmental and institutional travel money to present their work at conferences.
- Reward Collaboration Younger faculty who are trained in a research model may need help with developing their teaching skills. As many young faculty will work at teaching institutions, doctoral programs need to offer aspiring faculty members opportunities to develop these skills. Colleges and universities can provide occasions for collaboration with experienced faculty, including those who are new to the campus, which can be key to their professional development. These can include establishing learning communities and linked courses to create opportunities for collaborative teaching and learning. Institutional leaders can work to change reward systems which prize individual over collaborative work.
- Reward Scholarly Service Chairs and deans can also be more thoughtful about how institutional service is defined and weighted for tenure-track faculty. For example, if a new hire is also heading up a new program, the candidate can document this process from a scholarly point of view in preparation for tenure.
- Reward Scholarly Teaching Many departments and institutions seek faculty with teaching skills which encompass a broad range of expertise including curriculum development for students with diverse learning styles, student advising, and involvement in internships. All aspects of teaching should be approached and rewarded as scholarly activities.

- Provide Peer Support for Seasoned Scholars Departments and small colleges need to be able to provide a different kind of support to newly hired faculty who already have significant experience. Peer mentoring opportunities with existing faculty can help new faculty understand the unique aspects of the department or institution. At the same time, it is important that the department or institution recognize the value of the experience and utilize the expertise of veteran scholars.
- Integrate Part Timer and Adjuncts As reliance on part-time or adjunct faculty increases, departments or colleges need to create structures to help bring these faculty together and into the culture of the department and institution. Program administrators who coordinate the work of part timers and adjuncts and bring them together with full-time faculty can provide a link to the community. A chair can schedule important meetings to take place when the part-time faculty are on campus. If possible, administrators can position part-time and full-time faculty offices physically close together to help build community. Faculty handbooks for visiting lecturers and part timers are useful resources, especially for those on short-term contracts who need to understand the lay of the land quickly.
- Accommodate Faculty Lives Departments and institutions need to develop policies and work schedules to meet the needs of faculty with children and other personal responsibilities, such as caring for aging parents. Web based courses and technology can ease the burden of a faculty member by providing more flexibility in work hours.

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